



The development of the Saint Croix Foundation Youth Advisory Council: A bridge to narrow the gap

Leslie Hamdorf, Saint Croix Foundation Youth Advisory Coordinator, The Saint Croix Foundation
[lhamdorf@ghsvi.org]

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Summary

The Saint Croix Foundation Youth Advisory Council (SCFYAC) is a pilot program that explores best practices for youth leadership development through service learning, mentorship, coaching, and peer meetings. Participants identify a societal issue and partner with local and international youth to devise ways to address it. The inclusion of youth through service learning validates their experiences and voice in the restructuring of their communities (Block, 2008). The research goals are:

1. Incorporate service learning into leadership development.
2. Identify a societal issue for students to address.
3. Analyze how leadership development, through service learning, impacts civic awareness.

Data was collected from community surveys and focus groups, minutes from meetings, interviews, and surveys given to SCFYAC members. Program success is attributed to a foundational framework created by leadership and intrapersonal communication theories supported by an open system to create an effective model for leadership development. As important as closed systems are, open systems and availability of SCFYAC to the community are just as important. This model empowers the adult community members to engage youth by offering support to lead the community in change. This research provides examples of effective cross-cultural and cross-generational communication in service learning.

Flexibility has been necessary when engaging youth in service learning because of a cyclical approach of sensing, action, and reflection (Kronick, Cunningham, & Gourley, 2011). This research provides an example of how youth voice can be influential in creating community change. This model is also adaptable for educators, community organizers, and researchers interested in including youth in community change. The practice of including youth in the conversation of transformational community change for 21st century society is imperative for communities to be sustainable and innovative.

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